The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham & Black Country

Birmingham and Black Country

Local Wildlife & Geological Sites

- Guidance for Selection -

September 2018

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Contents

1. Introduction

1.1 Local Sites systems operate throughout England for the purpose of conferring a level of protection to those sites of substantive nature conservation or geological value that are not otherwise covered by national or international designations. In Birmingham and the Black Country (the metropolitan boroughs of Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton) the Local Sites system encompass both Wildlife (i.e. habitats and species) and Geological (including geomorphological) assets.

1.2 National guidance has been published by Defra to ensure some consistency between the many Local Sites systems (see 'Local Sites – Guidance on their identification, selection and management' –Defra PB11684 2006). The system defined in this document conforms to this guidance.

1.3 Local Wildlife and Geological Sites receive their protection primarily through the operation of the planning system. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF]) (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, July 2018) provides the national planning context:

The NPPF states in paragraph 170 that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan).

Paragraph 171 states that Plans [i.e. local and neighbourhood plans that have been brought into force and any spatial development strategies produced by combined authorities or elected Mayors] should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites[1]; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework [the NPPF]; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.

Paragraph 174 of the NPPF states that: To protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should:

a) Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites[1] of importance for biodiversity; wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation; and

b) promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity.

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) and Government Circular 06/2005: 'Biodiversity and Geological Conservation - statutory obligations and their impact within the planning system' provides further guidance in respect of statutory obligations for biodiversity and geological conservation and impact within the planning system.

The Black Country Core Strategy, Birmingham Development Plan and other documents including Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) adopted by local authorities provide the local planning context.

[1] The NPPF defines international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity as: All international sites (Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, and Ramsar sites), national sites (Sites of Special Scientific Interest) and locally designated sites including Local Wildlife Sites.

1.4 It is important to note, however, that the selection of Local Sites and the maintenance of site schedules is carried out independently of the making of planning policy.

1.5 The first Local Sites schedule for Birmingham and the Black Country was published in 1977 and the sites have been protected ever since by a succession of local planning policy and nature conservation strategies. More recently, the Birmingham and Black Country Nature Improvement Area Ecological Strategy 2017-2022 has been published. This sets out a landscape-scale strategy for creating a coherent ecological network in line with the recommendations of the government white paper Making Space for Nature (2010). This emphasises the need to take a landscape-scale approach to nature conservation in order to achieve a coherent and resilient ecological network of sites that can adapt to future changes.

1.6 This non-statutory system is intended to be comprehensive (i.e. all sites should be selected that meet the threshold for selection), whereas statutory designation systems such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are intended to provide a representative suite of sites.

1.7 Importantly Local Wildlife and Geological Sites are not assessed in a wider regional or national context.

1.8 In Birmingham and the Black Country Local Wildlife and Geological Sites encompass what are termed Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) and Sites of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SLINCs). This two-tier system aims to ensure that all sites of substantive local nature conservation and geological value are selected by assessing sites in both a sub-regional (i.e. Birmingham and the Black Country) and metropolitan borough or city context (either Birmingham, Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall or Wolverhampton). The two designations are defined as:

- **Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs)** - Sites of substantive nature conservation value in the context of Birmingham and the Black Country.
- **Sites of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SLINCs)** - Sites of substantive nature conservation value in the context of a metropolitan borough.

1.9 **Potential Sites of Importance (PSIs)** have not yet been assessed against the Local Wildlife and Geological Sites selection criteria but may potentially support species of note, areas of important semi-natural habitat or valuable geological features. PSIs are identified primarily through the use of aerial photography, but also through reference to old maps, existing records and local knowledge. Commonly these sites will not have been subject to the survey work necessary to undertake a Local Wildlife and Geological Sites assessment.

2. Selection of Local Wildlife & Geological Sites

2.1 To ensure the effective selection of Local Wildlife and Geological Sites a series of selection criteria have been produced against which all sites must be evaluated.

2.2 The Local Wildlife Sites selection criteria are based on reference criteria given in Local Sites: Guidance on their Identification, Selection and Management (Defra, 2006) which are themselves based on those contained in A Nature Conservation Review (Ratcliffe ed. 1977) (commonly referred to as 'Ratcliffe's Criteria'). These have been adapted to best serve the needs of the Local Sites system in Birmingham and the Black Country and the resource it works to protect. The Local Geological Sites selection criteria were originally developed by the Black Country Geological Society when geological sites were incorporated into the Local Sites system in 1997.

2.3 The Selection Criteria are divided under three headings: Ecological, Geological and Social. Sites can be evaluated against either the Ecological or Geological criteria or against both where appropriate. All sites must be assessed against the Social criteria, however, no site can be assessed against the Social criteria only.

2.4 The Ecological and Geological criteria are of primary importance. The Social criteria evaluate the value derived from experiencing natural features and therefore no site will be selected where it scores highly against Social criteria only.

2.5 For site evaluation purposes a value (either High, Medium, Low or Unknown) must be given against each of the criteria based on the information collected and presented in a Birmingham & Black Country Local Sites Assessment Report. Attributing values requires an informed judgment being made with reference to the selection criteria and the guidance given within these. In the assessment report a summary of how this value judgment was reached must be given for each of the criteria.

2.6 There are no 'absolute' values for any of the criteria and their application is not mechanical or rule-based. The criteria are, however, based on sound, rational principles and their application requires a good knowledge and understanding of the local ecological and geological resource.

2.7 Based on the values attributed against each of the criteria a judgment must be made as to whether a site merits Local Site status. Those sites scoring mostly 'Highs' will tend to meet the threshold for SINC status whereas those scoring mostly 'Mediums' will tend to meet the threshold for SLINC status. Sites scoring mostly 'Lows' will tend not to meet the threshold for selection as a Local Site. Not all criteria, however, are of equal weight. In some cases a site may justify selection where very few criteria score highly (e.g. where the site supports a population of a protected or priority species, or displays a single important geological feature).

2.8 Statutory nature conservation sites that are designated for their geological value may be designated as Local Wildlife Sites or vice-versa, however, sites will not be selected as wildlife or geological Local Sites if they are statutorily protected for these reasons (this does not apply to Local Nature Reserve designations, see 2.9).

2.9 Local Nature Reserve (LNR) status will not be considered when evaluating sites as this designation considers different attributes to that of the Local Wildlife and Geological Sites system.

2.10 Sites will be assessed periodically and their status re-assessed. The frequency with which sites should be re-assessed is dependent upon the ecological or geological features present and how susceptible these are to change.

2.11 Sites which have deteriorated through neglect or wilful damage will not be deselected as Local Sites without considering the potential for restoration.

3. Local Wildlife & Geological Sites Selection Criteria

3.1 Ecological Criteria

3.1.1 Habitat Diversity

Rationale

Habitat 'types', variants of these and the ecotones between different habitats not only have an intrinsic value in themselves, but sites comprising a higher diversity of these will frequently support a wider range of associated species. Additionally, many species are dependent on the presence of more than one habitat type (amphibians for example) or the ecotone between two habitats (e.g. woodland edges).

Habitat diversity is broader than habitat 'types' however, and variation within single habitats is also an important consideration. These variations include attributes such as micro-climate, micro-habitats (for example dead wood or bare soil), topography, parent rocks and derived soils. Structural diversity within a habitat type is also important (e.g. variations in the physical and temporal structure of a woodland) and in some circumstances diversity may depend on the presence of different stages of ecological succession. A site with a restricted number of habitats can therefore score highly, especially if there is variation of the type described.

Habitat diversity should not be sought to the detriment of other attributes such as rarity or naturalness.

Attributing Value

Sites which would tend to score highly under this criterion are:

- Those that support a range of habitats.
- Those that support habitats with physical and/or structural variation or are otherwise of notable complexity.

3.1.2 Species Diversity

Rationale

A high diversity of species will usually be a positive attribute of a site. Species diversity should not be interpreted simply as the total number of species, however, and it is important that sites are assessed against the norms of the habitats under consideration. For example, some habitats are intrinsically species-poor, and a direct comparison between these and an intrinsically species-rich habitat would underestimate the value of the former. Outstanding diversity within a single species group (e.g. Odonata, Lepidoptera or avifauna) may also justify a high score.

Species diversity should be assessed over as wider range of groups as possible. In many cases, however, the available information will relate predominantly to flora and therefore this criterion will commonly be assessed on botanical diversity.

Furthermore, there are species that are considered to be indicators of particular habitat types or of habitat 'quality'. The presence of an assemblage of these would be of greater value and score more highly than the presence of a larger number of species associated with negative disturbance of the same habitat. Specifically, it is recommended that the '**axiophyte**' list of plant species strongly associated with sites of nature conservation interest in Birmingham and the Black Country is referred to and axiophyte species present at the site be listed in the assessment. A copy of the list and more detail on the definition of axiophytes is provided in Appendix 5.

Attributing Value

Sites which would tend to score highly under this criterion are:

- Those that support a high overall diversity of plants and/or animals.
- Those that support species-diverse examples of their component habitats.
- Those that support a high diversity of discrete groups or assemblages of species.
- Those that support an assemblage of 'indicator' species.

3.1.3 Habitat Rarity

Rationale

Most habitats and their variants have an intrinsic value and those that are rare or less common are perhaps most in need of recognition and protection. In addition to their intrinsic value these may support species or communities unique to the habitat, which clearly adds to their importance. Sites that support habitats that are rare internationally, regionally or locally are therefore of value in the context of the Local Sites system, even where the habitat(s) may be in unfavourable condition.

Attributing Value

Sites which would tend to score highly under this criterion are:

- Internationally or nationally identified habitats (e.g. Annex 1 habitats in European Habitats Directive and Habitats of Principal Importance listed under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006).
- Those that support Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority Habitats.
- Those that are rare in a Birmingham and Black Country context.

3.1.4 Species Rarity

Rationale

For rare species an individual population may represent an important part of the total population and its loss may result directly in the reduction of the species' geographical range. The loss of a local population may also result in the irreversible loss of genetic diversity, local races or sub-species, and ultimately of species themselves.

Individual sites may therefore contribute significantly to the protection of species that are rare or declining nationally, regionally or locally. These include those species protected under international and national legislation, Red Data Book species and BAP Priority Species. Sites that support populations of species that are not considered rare or declining internationally or nationally, but that are rare in the sub-region or local authority area are also of value in the context of the Local Sites system.

In the broader sense this criterion refers not only to individual species but also to communities and species groups, and due consideration should be given to the presence of these on a site.

Attributing Value

Sites which would tend to score highly under this criterion are:

- Those that support species protected by international or national legislation (e.g. the European Habitats Directive & the Wildlife and Countryside Act).
- Those that support species listed under Section 41 of the NERC Act (2006) (Species of Principal Importance).
- Those that support BAP Priority Species.

- Those that support species that are considered uncommon, rare or very rare - excluding introduced species - (e.g. those that are rare in Birmingham and the Black Country or listed as Red Data Book species).
- Those that support fauna species identified as of 'Conservation Concern' by the RSPB (Red List & Amber List bird species), the Mammal Society (National Decline & England Decline) or by Butterfly Conservation West Midlands (Regional Decline).
- Those that support species listed on other relevant species schedules.

3.1.5 Size or Extent

Rationale

The ecological value of a site will usually increase with area. Larger sites tend to be more diverse in habitats and species, and can support larger populations. They can also better support species dependent upon extensive territories or foraging areas, are more able to tolerate disturbance and are less prone to local extinctions.

Size or Extent should not be used only as a simple measure of total site area however, and other factors including the size and quality of specific habitat types must also be considered. For example, the area covered by a 'large' pond may be considered a 'small' woodland; a site may contain a small area of a habitat that is uncommon in the conurbation; or one that is a particularly high quality example. These examples are potentially significant in the context of the Local Sites system and could therefore score highly even if only of limited physical extent.

The size of populations of certain species and communities should also be considered under this criterion. For example, a large population of a rare or protected species, or a large example of a specialist community may also score highly.

Attributing Value

Sites which would tend to score highly under this criterion are:

- Larger sites.
- Those sites containing significant areas of a single habitat type.
- Those sites supporting a significant population of a species defined in the Rare Species criterion.
- Those sites supporting a significant species community.

3.1.6 Naturalness

Rationale

Human activities past and present have had such an impact that even those parts of the landscape that seem least modified are usually more accurately described as 'semi-natural'. Here therefore the concept of 'naturalness' is considered not as the absence of human intervention or legacy, but the degree to which a site supports natural features or natural processes.

Long established habitats associated with traditional rural landscape form and management practice are perhaps the most easily identifiable as 'natural' in this context (e.g. heathlands, woodlands and unimproved grasslands). Habitats such as these may support long-standing ecological associations between species and physical conditions that cannot easily be re-created. These habitats have an intrinsic value that is particularly significant where they have been least affected by modern human activity including the introduction of species, alterations in physical structure, physical disturbance to soils and the addition of soil nutrients.

This criterion is, however, not defined only by longevity or history and does not apply only to habitats of a rural origin. Natural processes and ecological associations of value can develop at any pace through the colonisation and succession of an area, whatever the preceding dominant activity may have been. This may apply to previously developed sites, formerly arable sites or those where semi-natural habitats have altered through abandonment of management. Stability can be an important consideration (e.g. where 'arrested succession' is in evidence on a highly modified sub-strate), as short-lived habitats may be commonplace and relatively easy to re-create.

Attributing Value

Sites which would tend to score highly under this criterion are:

- Those which have developed through consistent management over a very long period.
- Those where species colonisation has occurred through natural processes (i.e. not introduced purposefully or directly through human activity).
- Those which have been least influenced by human activity.
- Those that have developed on intrinsically nutrient-poor soils and where there is a rarity or absence of species associated with anthropogenic disturbance.
- Those where associations between species, communities and habitats have developed and where these cannot easily be re-created.

3.1.7 Position & Connectivity

Rationale

Besides directly supporting wildlife within their boundaries, sites may also have an important role in supporting populations of species within the wider landscape. This includes populations that survive across a group of sites (where exchange of individuals maintains genetic diversity and helps to prevent local extinctions), populations that require physically linked sites to colonise new areas, and those where different sites are utilised for different purposes (e.g. foraging and breeding).

Individual sites must therefore be considered in terms of the contribution they make to such ecological networks.

The Birmingham and Black Country Nature Improvement Area Ecological Strategy 2017-2022 sets out a landscape-scale approach to nature conservation and identifies 'Core Ecological Areas' (those areas of the conurbation that are richest in wildlife) and 'Ecological Linking Areas' which link core areas and the wider landscape. The position of a site within this network may be relevant in determining the score awarded for this criterion.

Attributing Value

Sites which would tend to score highly under this criterion are:

- Those which have physical links with other sites and the wider landscape.
- Those which have strong ecological links with other local sites supporting similar species and habitat assemblages.
- Those which have strong ecological links with other local sites supporting different but complementary habitat assemblages.
- Those which are strategic ecological 'stepping stones'.

3.2 Geological Criteria

3.2.1 Intrinsic Scientific Interest

Rationale

The scientific interest of a site will contribute to an understanding of the geological past and its heritage, and the interpretation of the area's geodiversity. It will be expressed through:

Palaeontology

Rock types can be characterised by the types of fossils found within them. Fossils are a vestige of the wildlife of the past and their occurrence helps to date the rocks and make comparisons with rocks from other localities. Fossils are also indicators of ancient environments and provide clues to evolutionary pathways of animal and plant families.

Stratigraphy

The types and ages of different rocks provide a record of the depositional environments at the time of their formation and is the fundamental expression of an area's geodiversity. Individual sites contribute to this geodiversity and local distinctiveness and character.

Structure

Some sites exhibit faulting, folding and other landform features providing information on the tectonic history of an area or region.

Physiography, Geomorphology and Natural Processes

Features resulting from weathering or glacial action, landforms and active processes such as river meanders that impact upon the landscape.

Attributing Value

Sites which would tend to score highly under this criterion are:

- Those that have a distinctive or diverse range of fossils.
- Those that have unusual or rare fossil groups.
- Those that illustrate the geological diversity of the area.
- Those that contribute to an understanding or interpretation of the landscapes, climate and environments in the geological past in the area.
- Those that exhibit structural features e.g. faulting, folding.
- Those that demonstrate geomorphological processes, e.g. river meanders, alluvial deposits, ice age related features etc.

3.2.2 Rarity

Rationale

The uniqueness of a site in the local or regional context. In cases where there are no other exposures of a particular horizon within a borough, then sites may be selected on this criterion alone in the interest of conserving geodiversity.

Attributing Value

Sites which would tend to score highly under this criterion are:

- Those that are stratigraphically uncommon.
- Those which have rock types or parts of the geological succession that are under-represented.
- Those sites that have unique features.

3.2.3 Association with Other Sites and Features

Rationale

The site contributes to a network of sites and the bigger picture for interpretation and understanding of the geological past on a wider or landscape scale.

The site may have both geological as well as biological/ecological value which is of value to a local neighbourhood or demonstrates the underpinning influence of geology upon habitat and flora.

Attributing Value

Sites which would tend to score highly under this criterion are:

- Those sites which contribute to a network of sites that aid the interpretation and understanding of an area.
- Those sites which have a moderate geological value and also have a moderate or better ecological value

3.3 Social Criteria

3.3.1 Historical & Cultural

Rationale

Because the natural environment has been so extensively shaped and influenced by human activity, the natural features of value in the landscape of today are often also important parts of our cultural heritage. Such features can contribute considerably to the quality of the local environment as well as helping to define local distinctiveness.

The historic land-use and activities that have created these features are many and varied. They include post-industrial sites and their associated structures and by-products (e.g. spoil or slag heaps), transport networks (e.g. canals, dismantled railway lines, 'green' lanes and holloways), agricultural landscapes (e.g. hedgerows, ancient woodlands, ridge and furrow systems) or residences and formal landscapes (e.g. artificial lakes, avenues of trees or moats). Within these there may be features of finer detail (e.g. bank and ditch systems, ancient coppice stools or pollards) which add additional value.

A further example of the relationship between the cultural and natural landscape is that between local geology and its uses in the built environment. Not only do many places contain structures made of locally quarried products, but the former quarries from which these materials came may now be sites of local value for their geological and/or ecological features.

Sites may also have links to historic events or have literary or other associations in art. Such recording or portrayal can reveal changes in perception of the natural environment and the economic value that it has been ascribed at different times.

Attributing Value

Sites which would tend to score highly under this criterion are:

- Those with links to historic agricultural practice.
- Those with links to local historic industrial development.
- Those with links to former societies.
- Those with links to historic events or those that have literary and artistic associations.

3.3.2 Recorded History

Rationale

A record of research, scientific literature references, association with scientists of recognised stature or contributions to scientific advances adds considerably to a site's interest. For example, where geological concepts were first demonstrated or where new ecological methods and techniques have been trialled, refined and reported upon.

Additionally, a long-term record of the natural processes acting upon or being displayed within a site, the management of a site or comprehensive ecological records for a site can add considerably to its interest.

Attributing Value

Sites which would tend to score highly under this criterion are:

- Those with links to scientific research and advances.
- Those with long-term records of features or management.

3.3.3 Access

Rationale

Sites that provide people with the chance to experience nature and a high quality natural environment are important. Access to sites is particularly valuable in urban areas with relatively fewer opportunities for the appreciation of nature. In these circumstances small sites or those of lesser intrinsic nature conservation interest may be of increased value for the opportunities they provide for the appreciation of nature.

Uncontrolled access is not, however, always desirable. Any adverse impacts that this may have on the nature conservation value of the site must be considered.

Attributing Value

Sites which would tend to score highly under this criterion are:

- Those with legitimate and safe public access.
- Those that are close to peoples' homes and/or close to public transport routes.
- Those in areas with little accessible natural greenspace.
- Those not adversely impacted upon by public access.
- Those specifically managed to accommodate public access and where resources such as interpretation or organised events are provided.

3.3.4 Aesthetic

Rationale

Areas of ecological and geological value can be visually attractive, helping to define a sense of place and contributing to the quality of life of the people who live or work there.

A site's visual contribution to the local environment and the views into and out of a site should be considered, as should features that provide a seasonal high point such as a carpet of bluebells, heather in bloom, autumn colour or an annual display of meadow flowers.

Attributing Value

Sites which would tend to score highly under this criterion are:

- Those that are attractive with a high visual quality.
- Landscapes that are important to local communities reflecting natural and industrial heritage.
- Those that contribute positively to local distinctiveness and a sense of place.
- Those with a high value for the appreciation of nature.

3.3.5 Value for Learning

Rationale

Sites of ecological and geological interest can be valuable local educational resources, enabling people of all ages to learn about and better understand the natural world around them.

Some locally designated sites can provide opportunities for formal education which the national statutory network of sites cannot fulfil alone. Many sites are used or are suitable for further education, higher education and postgraduate studies, and are valuable for training new environmental professionals. Research, investigation or experimental work may be undertaken as a part of this. Sites which illustrate local natural features are valuable to primary and secondary schools for project work and for activities that link with the National Curriculum.

There is an equal need to provide a focus for more informal education and opportunities for the wider community. Sites can have a role in the development of skills through involvement in their protection, management and recording. All these activities can potentially benefit sites through promoting wider understanding, support and care of these local assets.

Attributing Value

Sites which would tend to score highly under this criterion are:

- Those that are currently utilised for formal and informal education.
- Those that are close to educational establishments.
- Those with legitimate and safe student access.
- Those that are unlikely to be damaged by educational use.
- Those that are managed to accommodate student access and that provide resources such as interpretation or organised events.
- Those that demonstrate features as set out in the National or other curricula.

Appendix 1: Notes on Completing the Report Form

A1.1 Survey and information required to complete a Local Sites Assessment

The standard of survey work and assessment must be sufficient to comply with the local guidance on assessing Local Sites. All work must be rigorously carried out to justify formal designation of sites, and be robust enough to be defensible in planning appeals.

Surveys must be undertaken by suitably qualified staff, experienced in ecological or geological surveys of this type, at an appropriate time of year for the habitat types/species or features present. More than one survey visit and type of survey may be necessary to collect the appropriate data to determine if a site meets the threshold for selection as a Local Site.

To assess a site against the ecological criteria:

The following must be undertaken for each site assessment:

- An EcoRecord data search which includes:
  - a complete list of ecological records and reports held for the site
  - records of species of note and details of nature conservation sites within a minimum 1km radius
- A Phase 1 Habitat Survey in accordance with the methodology issued by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC, 2010). Surveys should be of a resolution sufficient to identify habitat features of $10m^2$ and larger, although there may be cases where smaller features need to be mapped, for example small ponds or small areas of a floristically-rich habitat.
- Comprehensive survey and recording of plant species present. Where sites can be divided into ecologically distinct and discrete compartments a list of species present in each compartment is required.
- Incidental records of fauna or their field signs, as well as incidental records of any other taxon groups, e.g. fungi or bryophytes.
- Field notes on the suitability of habitats for other notable fauna.
- Field notes on the current management, condition and structure of each habitat parcel.
- Field notes on signs of use including formal and informal access points and paths, littering, interpretation boards etc.

To assess a site against the geological criteria:

- A data search must be undertaken that includes any existing records/reports held by EcoRecord.
- A geological survey undertaken by a competent surveyor.

Other information sources include:

GeoConservation UK guidance on Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS are synonymous with Local Geological Sites) including guidance on recording documenting geological sites
http://wiki.geoconservationuk.org.uk/index.php5?title=RIGS_Handbook_Contents

British Geological Society (BGS) - 1:625,000 bedrock & superficial deposits GIS layers
www.bgs.ac.uk/downloads/browse.cfm?sec=6&cat=11.

BGS - Geology of Britain viewer http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html

UKSO – Soils Map Viewer http://mapapps2.bgs.ac.uk/ukso/home.html

To assess a site against the social criteria:

- A desk study should be undertaken that includes reference to historic maps.
- Proximity to residential areas, schools, other areas of public open space and important social features should be assessed.
- During site visits notes should be taken regarding signs of use including formal and informal access points and paths, littering, interpretation boards etc.

Other information sources in the Birmingham and Black Country area can be found here.

A1.2 Outputs required

- A Local Sites Assessment Report form needs to be completed for each site in line with the local guidance and include:
    - A map depicting the survey boundary, current SINC and/or SLINC boundaries (where these exist) and any recommended revised/new SINC or SLINC boundaries.
    - Phase 1 Habitat Map(s) with target notes highlighting features of note referenced in the text.
    - Any other maps that illustrate particular aspects relevant to the assessment (these may include geological features, management recommendations, historic maps and any maps showing features of importance).
    - Photographs illustrative of the site and of key features.
    - Species lists.
- An excel spreadsheet (or equivalent) listing all species recorded during any new surveys undertaken for this assessment.
- Any additional sources of information used to support the assessment and not in the public domain.
- Any GIS data files produced (including habitat polygons/lines, targets notes, survey boundaries and any recommended SINC/SLINC designation boundaries). File format should be MapInfo GIS compatible.

A1.3 Completing the Local Sites Assessment Form

The following are explanatory notes for each of the fields in the Birmingham and the Black Country Local Sites Assessment Report form:

EcoRecord Reference[1]: The unique code allocated to a site by EcoRecord (where this exists).

Site Name[1]: The default site name as allocated by EcoRecord.

Grid Reference[1]: The default British National Grid Reference allocated to the site by EcoRecord.

Designation(s)[1]: The current nature conservation designation(s) for the site i.e: SAC (Special Area of Conservation), SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest), NNR (National Nature Reserve), LNR (Local Nature Reserve), SINC (Site of Importance for Nature Conservation), SLINC (Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation) or WC (Wildlife Corridor).

Survey Date(s): The date of the survey (or surveys) undertaken for this assessment. This excludes any historical surveys identified in the data search. Where an assessment has been conducted from a desk study only n/a should be entered in this box. Where multiple surveys have been undertaken, the individual dates should be recorded.

Planning Authority: The local planning authority.

Site Ownership: Given as either private (with owner or unknown in brackets) or name of public body (e.g. local authority or statutory agency).

Area/Length: Given in hectares to two decimal points or metres to one decimal point.

Reason for Survey: The reason why this survey/site assessment has been undertaken.

Report Date: The date the site report was completed/compiled.

Meets LS Criteria: The findings of the assessment, i.e. SINC, SLINC or None.

Type: (of Local Site) either Wildlife, Geological or Wildlife & Geological.

Amendment: Whether this is a New Site, Upgrade (i.e. SLINC to SINC), Downgrade (i.e. SINC to SLINC), Extension or Whole/Part Deletion. Any boundary amendments must be accompanied by a map illustrating changes.

Citation (Summary of Value): A short description of the main ecological, geological and social value (as appropriate) of the site.

Local Site Selection Criteria: Here the Birmingham and Black Country Local Site Selection Criteria are listed. Against each criterion assessed a value (either High, Medium or Low) must be given (written as H, M or L). A short written justification of the value attributed must also be given (note, however, that the Local Site Selection Criteria section of the form should not extend beyond the first page of the form).

If the site has not been assessed for either Ecological or Geological value, then the criteria not assessed can be removed and replaced with n/a. All sites must be assessed against the Social criteria.

[1] These details will be provided by EcoRecord upon request.

Site Description: A summary description of the site to include features such as location, historic associations, habitats, land use, topography, social use etc.

Habitat descriptions: All habitats should be listed in accordance with their Phase 1 Habitat category name and alphanumeric code (in accordance with JNCC handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey, 2010). Below each habitat category a concise description of this must be given. This should include location, extent, physical characteristics, dominant species, species and features of note, and any other information considered relevant.

Habitats of Note: All habitats recorded on site during this survey or historically that are considered notable should be recorded in this table. Each is listed with its Phase 1 Habitat category name and alphanumeric code, the date it was most recently recorded at the site and the reason for which it is considered notable, as described below:

- **Habitat** - The Phase 1 Habitat category code.
- **EHD** - where the habitat meets the description of habitats in the European Habitats Directive the relevant habitat type name should be listed here.
- **BAP** - where the habitat meets the description of any current UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitat. Of the 56 UK Priority Habitats 22 have been recorded to date in Birmingham and the Black Country. The relevant habitat type name should be listed here. See Appendix 6.
- **NERC** - where the habitat meets the description of any current Habitat of Principal Importance listed under the NERC Act (2006) (Section 41). The relevant habitat type name should be listed here.
- **Rarity** - where habitats meet the description of those included on the B&BC Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) list of locally rare/priority habitats administered by EcoRecord. See Appendix 6.
- **Year recorded** - the most recent year the habitat has been recorded at the site.

Species of Note: All species of note that have been identified as present at the site through recent or historical surveys should be recorded in this table. Each is listed with its common (English) and scientific name, the date it was most recently recorded at the site and the reason for which it is considered notable, as described below:

Flora: Any notable flora species that have been recorded at the site are listed:

- **Species** – English name followed by scientific (Latin) name in italics (e.g. Crosswort *Cruciata laevipes*).
- **Statutory** - for those species protected by European and UK legislation an acronym of the legislation is given:

  EHD = EU Habitats Directive. WCA S8 = Wildlife & Countryside Act Schedule 8 (higher and lower plants with various levels of protection).
- **BAP** - Y is entered if the species is included on the latest national lists of BAP Priority Species. See appendix 5.
- **NERC** - Y is entered if the species is included in Section 41 of the NERC Act (2006 or amended) as of Principal Importance.
- **RL** - Y is entered if the species is included on Global IUCN or British Red Lists (Red Data Books).
- **Rarity** - a U, R or VR is entered for those flora species classified as being Uncommon, Rare or Very Rare in Birmingham & the Black Country by EcoRecord. See appendix 5.
- **Axiophyte** – Y is entered if the species is included on the Birmingham & the Black Country list of axiophytes. See appendix 5.
- **Year recorded** - the most recent year the species has been recorded at the site.

Fauna: Any notable fauna species that have been recorded at the site are listed:

- **Species** – English name followed by scientific (Latin) name in italics (e.g. Great Crested Newt *Triturus cristatus*).
- **Statutory** - for those species protected by European and UK legislation an acronym of the legislation is given:

  EHD = EU Habitats Directive. WCA S1 = Wildlife & Countryside Act Schedule 1 (birds protected at all times). WCA S5 = Wildlife & Countryside Act Schedule 5 (animals with various levels of protection). PBA = Protection of Badgers Act 1992.
- **BAP** - Y is entered if the species is included on the latest national lists of BAP Priority Species. See appendix 5.
- **NERC** - Y is entered if the species is included on Section 41 of the NERC Act (2006) as of Principal Importance.
- **RL** - Y is entered if the species is included on Global IUCN or British Red Lists (Red Data Books).
- **Concern -** for those species included on relevant lists or schedules (e.g. by RSPB, the Mammal Society and Butterfly Conservation) as of concern an acronym of the list/schedule is given:

  Birds: R = Red List - species that are Globally Threatened according to the International Union for Nature Conservation criteria; those whose population or range has declined rapidly in recent years; and those that have declined historically and not shown a substantial recent recovery. A = Amber List - species with an unfavourable conservation status in Europe; those whose population or range has declined moderately in recent years; those whose population has declined historically but made a substantial recent recovery; rare breeders; and those with internationally important or localised populations.

  Mammals: ND = National Decline and ED = England Decline as measured by the Mammal Societies Table of Recent Population Changes in the Native Species of Land Mammals.

  Invertebrates: RD = Regional Decline identified in Butterfly Conservation West Midlands Regional Action Plan.
- **Rarity** - a U, R or VR is entered for those species classified as being Uncommon, Rare or Very Rare in Birmingham & the Black Country by EcoRecord. Refer to appendix 5 for a B&BC species rarity list.
- **Year recorded** - the most recent year the species has been recorded at the site.

Site/Habitat Suitability for Other Species of Note (not recorded during the survey): Where it is considered likely that other species of note besides those recorded during the survey could be present, this should be described in this section. The species/species group and location of suitable habitat should be described here (accompanying maps can be included if appropriate). Where the potential for a notable species to be present is identified, additional survey work should be recommended and this should be included in the recommendations table.

Invasive Species: Details of species recorded at the site that are listed on Schedule 9 pt. 1 & 2 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 as amended are listed:

- **Species** – English name followed by scientific (Latin) name in italics (e.g. Japanese knotweed *Fallopia japonica*).
- **Location -** grid reference/description.
- **Abundance –** described for fauna, recorded as a DAFOR value (Dominant, Abundant, Frequent, Occasional, Rare) for flora.
- **Year recorded** - the most recent year the species has been recorded at the site.

Geology

- **Drift/Solid Formation** – the name of the drift/solid formation.
- **Description** - summary description of the geology or geomorphological features.
- **Features of Value -** description of features of value with reference to the geological criteria.

Soils - a brief description of site soils (including attributes such as physical structure, macro-nutrients or pH where this is known or can be implied).

Public Access & Site Usage: Information on public accessibility and current usage of the site.

- **Land Use** – e.g. Pasture, Nature Reserve, Garden, Public Open Space, Golf Course etc.
- **Access Level** - either Unrestricted, Restricted or None.
- **Access Type(s)** - e.g. Private, Unofficial, Local Nature Reserve, Public Footpath Only etc.

Comparison with Previous Survey(s) Results: A description of any physical, ecological, geological or social changes that have occurred on the site since the last known survey.

Boundary (notes): A brief description of the rationale for the survey and any proposed Local Site boundary should be given here. The Local Site boundary should include all important features and may differ from the area surveyed. Where there are adjacent undesignated or unsurveyed areas which are likely to be important, this should be noted and a recommendation for further survey work made where necessary.

Summary of Assessment: A brief description/conclusion of the assessment with reference to recommendations for Local Site status and boundary changes etc.

Recommendations (including further survey & site management/enhancement recommendations): List any recommendations that would further understanding of the site and/or contribute to enhancing its value (more detailed information can be provided in the optional management brief). These might include:

- Further survey work to better understand the status of a recorded feature, to determine whether a notable species is present or to assess adjacent land parcels that may be of importance for the function or resilience of the site.
- Habitat management recommendations with brief description.
- Recommendations relating to ecological enhancement opportunities both on-site and in adjacent areas.
- Where changes in adjacent land-use might be beneficial, e.g. where the site may be negatively affected by spill lighting, dust or other avoidable impacts.

Data Sources: The sources of all information used to produce this report must be listed in the table below. For each type of data, all sources must be listed with the most recent first (see example below). Any data referenced here that is not provided by EcoRecord or is not readily available in the public domain must be provided with the assessment form.

Data Sources		
	Source	**Date**
Species and Habitat Data Source(s)	Site Survey: Allan Hurst, The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country.	12/05/2016
	EcoRecord data search.	2016
	Wolverhampton Phase 2 Survey, Dudley to Priestfield Railway.	July 1989
Geology Data Source(s)	British Geological Society 1:625,000 bedrock & superficial deposits GIS layers from BGS website: www.bgs.ac.uk/downloads/browse.cfm?sec=6&cat=11.	
Historic Data Sources(s)	Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway. (2016). In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 15:54, May 23, 2016, from https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Oxford,_Worcester_and_Wolverhampton_Railway&oldid=717728322	29/04/2016
	Ordnance Survey County Series Mapping 1884 - 1992.	1884-1992
Assessment Author and Organisation	Allan Hurst, The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country.	03/06/2016

Species Lists: An excel spreadsheet (or equivalent) must be provided containing a record of all species recorded during any new surveys undertaken to complete the assessment (spreadsheet template available in Appendix 4). The species list may be divided into compartments, species groups or dates as is relevant to the points being illustrated.

Site photographs: Representative photographs of the site and features of interest should be included with notes describing the location and features depicted.

Maps: A number of maps must be provided to illustrate this assessment as follows:

- A map depicting the survey area (where relevant), current SINC and/or SLINC boundaries (where these exist) and any recommended revised/new SINC or SLINC boundary.
- A Phase 1 Habitat Map(s) in line with the guidance in 'A Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey (JNCC, 2010). Target notes should be used to highlight features of note referenced in the text.
- Any other maps that illustrate particular aspects relevant to the assessment (these may include geological features, management recommendations, historic maps and any maps showing specific features of importance)

Management Brief (optional)**:** Detailed management prescriptions may be given in the Management Brief table. These should give a descriptive name to the *Action*, describe the *Objective & Rationale* for undertaking this, describe the *Method* by which the action should be undertaken and recommend *Timings* for these.

Appendix 2: Report Form

Birmingham & Black Country Local Sites Assessment Report

EcoRecord Reference	Site Name	Grid Reference	Designation(s)	Survey Date(s)
Planning Authority	**Site Ownership**	**Area/Length**	**Reason for Survey**	**Report Date**

Meets LS Criteria		Type		i.e. Wildlife/Geological

Amendment(s)		i.e. None; New Site; Upgrade; Downgrade; Extension; Whole/Part Deletion
Description		

Citation (Summary of Value)

Local Site Selection Criteria			
Ecological			
Habitat Diversity			
Species Diversity			
Habitat Rarity			
Species Rarity			
Size or Extent			
Naturalness			
Position & Connectivity			
Geological			
Intrinsic	Palaeontology		
	Stratigraphy		
	Structure		
	Physiography & Geomorphology		
Rarity			
Ass. with Other Sites			
Social			
Historical & Cultural			
Access			
Aesthetic			
Recorded History			
Value for Learning			

Site Description

Habitats			
Phase 1 Name		Phase 1 Code	
Phase 1 Name		Phase 1 Code	
Phase 1 Name		Phase 1 Code	
Phase 1 Name		Phase 1 Code	
Notes			

Habitats of Note [1]						
Phase 1 Name	Phase 1 Code	EHD	BAP	NERC	Rarity	Year Recorded
Notes						

Species of Note [1]							
Flora							
Species	Statutory	BAP	NERC	RL	Rarity	Axiophyte	Year Recorded
Notes							
Fauna							
Species	Statutory	BAP	NERC	RL	Concern	Rarity	Year Recorded
Notes							

Site/Habitat Suitability for Other Species of Note (not recorded during the survey)	
Description/Notes	

Invasive Species [2]			
Species	Location	Abundance (DAFOR)	Year Recorded
Notes			

Geology	
Solid/Drift Formation	
Description	
Features of Value	
1	
2	

Soils

Public Access & Site Usage	
Land Use	
Access Level	
Access Type(s)	

Comparison with Previous Survey(s) Results

Boundary (notes)

Summary of Assessment

Recommendations (including further survey & site management/enhancement)	
1	
2	

Data Sources		
	Source	**Date**
Species and Habitat Data Source(s)		
Geological Data Source(s)		
Historic Data Sources(s)		
Assessment Author and Organisation		

[1] HABITATS/SPECIES OF NOTE TABLES – ATTRIBUTE DEFINITIONS

STATUTORY (PROTECTED) -

EHD = EU Habitats Directive (plus where relevant the Annexe II or IV). ***PBA*** = Protection of Badgers Act 1992.
WCA S1 = Wildlife & Countryside Act Schedule 1 (birds protected at all times). ***WCA S5*** = Wildlife & Countryside Act Schedule 5 (animals with various levels of protection). ***WCA S8*** = Wildlife & Countryside Act Schedule 8 (higher and lower plants with various levels of protection).

BAP – Habitats/Species included on latest UK BAP list of Priority Habitats/Species.

NERC P.I. - Habitats/Species included on current list of Principal Importance in England under Section 41 of the NERC Act (2006 or amended).

RL - Species included on Global IUCN & British Red Lists (Red Data Books).

RARITY (HABITATS) - BIRMINGHAM & BLACK COUNTRY - Habitats included on the B&BC list of locally rare habitats (administered by EcoRecord).

RARITY (FLORA SPECIES) - BIRMINGHAM & BLACK COUNTRY - (based on data held and managed by EcoRecord).

VR = Very Rare - a species present in less than 1.0% of 1Km squares, tetrads, or 5Km squares in B&BC.
R = Rare - a species present in 1.0% - 4.3% of 1Km squares, tetrads, or 5Km squares in B&BC.
U = Uncommon - a species present in 4.3% - 12% of 1Km squares, tetrads or 5Km squares in B&BC.

AXIOPHYTE - included on the Birmingham & the Black Country list of axiophytes.

CONCERN (FAUNA SPECIES OF CONSERVATION CONCERN) -

Birds: ***R*** = Red List - species that are Globally Threatened according to the International Union for Nature Conservation criteria; those whose population or range has declined rapidly in recent years; and those that have declined historically and not shown a substantial recent recovery. ***A*** = Amber List - species with an unfavourable conservation status in Europe; those whose population or range has declined moderately in recent years; those whose population has declined historically but made a substantial recent recovery; rare breeders; and those with internationally important or localised populations.

Mammals: ***ND*** = National Decline and ***ED*** = England Decline as measured by the Mammal Societies Table of Recent Population Changes in the Native Species of Land Mammals.

Invertebrates: ***RD*** = Regional Decline identified in Butterfly Conservation West Midlands Regional Action Plan.

YEAR - The most recent year the species has been recorded.

[2] Species listed on Schedule 9 part 1 (animals) and part 2 (plants) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended - this lists animals which may not be released or allowed to escape into the wild and plants which may not be planted or otherwise caused to grow in the wild.

Report Maps

Site Photographs

Species Records

Appendix 3: Optional Management Brief (to be appended to completed report form if used)

Management Brief				
Action		Objective & Rationale	Method	Timings
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

The following appendices can be downloaded from www.ecorecord.org.uk/?q=content/local-sites-supporting-documents. Individual links are also provided below.

Appendix 4: Species Records Spreadsheet

Template available to download here

Appendix 5: Birmingham and the Black Country Species of Note

The following documents can be downloaded here:

- List of statutory protected, UKBAP and Local BAP species recorded in B&BC
- B&BC Species Rarity Lists
- B&BC Axiophyte List

Appendix 6: Birmingham and the Black Country Habitats of Note

The following documents can be downloaded here:

- UK BAP Priority Habitats present in B&BC
- B&BC Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitats

Appendix 7: Interactive Map of the Birmingham and Black Country Ecological Network

Interactive map available here

Appendix 8: Birmingham and the Black Country Biodiversity Action Plan (2010)

A copy of the B&BC BAP (2010) can be downloaded here

Appendix 9: Example of a completed Local Sites Assessment Report

An example assessment report can be downloaded here

Appendix 10: Local Sites Assessment Report Form

Template available to download here

Appendix 11: Local Sites Partnership for Birmingham and the Black Country Terms of Reference

B&BC LSP Terms of Reference available to download here

The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham & Black Country

Birmingham and Black Country

Local Wildlife & Geological Sites

- Guidance for Selection -

September 2018